

# It's Easy to Envy Football Queens

By Joan Ryan

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*"Rootie-toot-toot, Rootie-toot-toot, We are the boys from the Institute. We don't smoke, We don't chew, And we don't go with girls who do." . . . Ode to a Rice Institute Cotton Bowl princess (circa 1957)*

I was almost queen of the Cotton Bowl in 1957, a situation that hardly compensated for my total abstention from smoking and chewing during my first two years at college. It was my junior year at Rice. I had been elected one of the Ten Favorites and assigned to represent the Rice Owls at the Cotton Bowl on New Year's Day in Dallas.

Then, as now, the winner of the Southwest Conference title was the host team in the Cotton Bowl and the coed representing that winning school was always crowned queen. Girls representing the other SWC schools were members of the court.

The way I figured it, I had a queenship locked. My boyfriend was quarterback of the mighty Owls and I was confident of wearing the ermine as Richard III. Let others twirl their batons, I sniffed. My sights were set on a scepter.

I spent all fall preparing my act as queen of the Cotton Bowl. For hours I would perch on the Back-seat rim of my mother's green Oldsmobile convertible, where I perfected a royal wave that would give Elizabeth of England pause. My dreams were softened by visions of cotton bolls.

But the way it turned out, the Owls went into a late season molt and produced a serf-like 4-6 record. A girl from TCU -- I forget her name -- was queen that year. I don't think she even knew the Horned Frogs' quarterback.

I watched the game that New Year's Day some 20 years ago with my face frozen in a stoical runner-up expression. The gold (plated) disk on my charm bracelet said "Princess" and not "Queen." I fixed an icy stare on my boyfriend-the-quarterback, but he was blissfully unaware, watching Syracuse's Jim Brown score all 27 points in a 28-27 losing effort.

Some women won't admit it, but there is a queen complex hidden in most of us. How else can you explain Gloria Steinem's frosted hair, Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne's surgical eyelid tucks and model Cheryl Tiegs' crash diet that led directly to her sleek exposure on the cover of Sports Illustrated?

As if to prove my point, every year 700 young women from Pasadena, Calif., test the quality of their tans and the effectiveness of their orthodontia, hoping to become queen of the Tournament of Roses. A committee of judges whittle that unwieldy number down to a queen and her court. I saw this year's Rose Bowl Queen on Bob Hope's All-America TV program. She was dressed in queenly fashion while joking with the master comedian. Need I add, the runners-up were relegated to a backdrop position -- four princesses wearing identical red dresses.

The big thing about being queen of the Tournament of Roses is being in the nationally televised Rose Bowl Parade. The Queen rides on a huge float that is covered with delicately scented Blossoms. Cleopatra entering Rome manages a poor second.

The year I was in the Cotton Bowl the queen was presented with fanfare at halftime with the eyes of Texas upon her. We princesses were herded together to ride on the backseat rims of convertibles around the inside of the stadium before the game -- in deed, before the warmup. My royal wave would have gone unnoticed except that my mother arrived two hours early.

How I envy the beautiful brunette Rose Bowl Queen her big magical moment. Mine never came. The year after I served as princess in someone else's court, Rice -- led by my boyfriend-the-quarterback -- won the SWC title and played Navy in the Cotton Bowl. That made my good friend Penny Blackledge (class of '58) The Rice Institute Cotton Bowl Queen.

I was happy for Penny. She was a beautiful queen, although I could have taught her a few things about royal waves. I blamed fate -- and my boyfriend -- for my deprivation. But I held no grudge.

I hardly ever think about the year I was almost Cotton Bowl Queen. Just every Jan. 1. At kickoff time.